

SECOND HAND SMOKE EXPOSURE

Second hand smoke, also known as environmental tobacco smoke (ETS), is a combination of the smoke from a burning cigarette, cigar or pipe and the smoke exhaled by a smoker. Many people find ETS unpleasant, annoying, and irritating to the eyes and nose. More importantly, it represents a dangerous health hazard. Over 4,000 different chemicals have been identified in ETS, and at least 43 of these chemicals can cause cancer. According to Americans for Nonsmoker's rights, second hand smoke kills 53,000 non-smoking Americans every year.

Second hand smoke is especially harmful to pregnant women and to fetal development of organs such as the lungs and brain.

Exposure to ETS is dangerous to children of all ages. It decreases lung efficiency and impairs lung function. It increases both the frequency and severity of childhood asthma. Secondhand smoke can aggravate sinusitis, rhinitis, cystic fibrosis, and chronic respiratory problems such as cough and postnasal drip. It also increases the frequency of childhood colds and sore throats. In children under two, ETS exposure increases the likelihood of bronchitis and pneumonia. Exposure to ETS increases both the number of ear infections a child will experience, and the duration of the illness. Ear infections and middle ear fluid are the most common cause of children's hearing loss. Second hand smoke has been linked to childhood behavioral problems such as hyperactivity, aggression and depression. Even at a low exposure it may impair a child's reading, writing and cognitive skills.

For nonsmoking adults, secondhand smoke can cause or worsen diseases such as cancers, heart disease, stroke, diabetes, asthma and respiratory infections such as bronchitis.

New research suggests there are dangers of "third hand smoke". Even after a cigarette, cigar or pipe has burned out; the dangers of tobacco smoke contamination remain toxic in clothing, hair, curtains, furniture, and cars.

There is no safe level of exposure to second hand smoke or third hand smoke. Only a 100 percent smoke free environment effectively protects people from toxic smoke exposure.



Americans for Nonsmoker's Rights: www.no-smoke.org

Environmental Protection Agency: www.epa.gov